

EDUCATION AS A KEY FOR COASTAL CONSERVATION

Evy Copejans¹ and Claude Willaert²

¹ Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), secretariat European Marine Science Educators Association (EMSEA), InnovOcean site, Wandelaarkaai 7, 8400 Oostende, Belgium
E-mail: evy.copejans@vliz.be

² Provincie West-Vlaanderen, Steunpunt Natuur- en Milieueducatie (NME) Kust
Provinciaal Ankerpunt Kust, Wandelaarkaai 7, 8400 Oostende, Belgium
E-mail: claudewillaert@west-vlaanderen.be

Education and coastal conservation have the perfect relationship. While coastal protected areas provide sites for environmental education, citizens can participate in monitoring programs of the local biodiversity. A background to the basic ecological concepts will give the participants a feel of the coastal environment and the organisms therein. At the same time the Nature and Environmental Education (NME) initiatives strive to develop a lasting and caring attitude towards the marine and coastal environment, and a sense of personal responsibility in each participant, from the young to the senior citizens.

NME considers coastal education to be more than gaining knowledge about the coastal world. Direct experience with the environment is also of prime importance. Wading out into the sea and feeling the wind in your hair or the sand between your fingers and toes are sensory experiences that aid the memory and help to connect the theory to the real world. Environmental education without fieldwork is like science classes without the experiments.

Fieldwork reinforces the value of coastal specialists who help to translate scientific information and interpret coastal issues to educators or directly to the public in general. Marine educators are thus important agents for coastal conservation. An effective educational transformation depends upon how motivated, capable and supported these educators are. So it is critical to pay close attention to how we train and support both new and experienced educators. The new European Marine Science Educators Association (www.EMSEA.eu) is dedicated to provide opportunities for professional development and to facilitate the exchange of best practices in marine education. Europe has much to offer in terms of valuable marine projects and educational materials, but the efforts are often poorly visible, and thus seldom used by others.

Claude Willaert presents the annual seaweek (www.weekvandezee.be) in Belgium as one of the important coastal education events. Claude will guide you through some of the education resources and efforts how to work beyond the country's borders. Join Claude for a short break from the conference on a fieldtrip to the beach.

Evy Copejans puts marine and coastal education on a wider European perspective. She gives also details on the activities of EMSEA and the findings of the first conference on Ocean Literacy in Europe.